

Westhoughton Town Centre – Frequently Asked Questions

Updated 21/09/22

1. When did consultation on the Masterplan take place?

Public consultation between August and December run by Bolton at Home on their estates. and feedback was used to input into the draft masterplan produced by BDP.

A stakeholder event made up of the members of Westhoughton Town Centre Steering Group, local faith groups, local clubs and associations was held on 26th November 2019.

Formal public consultation on the draft masterplan proposals ran from the 27th January 2020 to 23rd February 2020. A questionnaire was available both online and in hard copy at key locations in Westhoughton including the library, MP's office and a number of shops. Two drop-in events took place at the library, on Wednesday 12th February 2020 and on Saturday 15th February between 10am and 2pm. Around 160 people attended the drop-in sessions and 159 responses to the questionnaire were received from a wide range of people and organisations.

The report to the Executive Cabinet Member on 9th November 2020 giving full details on the outcome of the public consultation can be found on the council website at:

<https://www.bolton.gov.uk/directory-record/1416/westhoughton-town-centre-masterplan-2020> The public consultation and subsequent reporting of the outcomes were undertaken in accordance with council policy and procedures. However, I have summarised the main outcome of the public consultation as follows:

Civic Buildings

89% of the public agreed or partly agreed to redevelop the Town Hall which would involve the conversion of surplus space within the town hall into a managed workspace development – providing space for small businesses and 'start-up' space for new businesses. A ground floor commercial café would serve the business and would also be open to the public.

89% of the public agreed to separate access to the upstairs of the library would be created to improve safety, security and visitor experience. Improvements to access arrangements at both the library and Carnegie Hall, together with simpler booking arrangements, will increase the use of the hall.

Improving the pedestrian links to the Town Centre

91% of the public agreed or partly agreed with the implementation of this proposal.

Remodelling of Market Street

72% of the public agreed or partly agreed with the implementation of this proposal.

Car Parking Strategy

85% of the public agreed or partly agreed to the proposal to undertake a car parking strategy

The draft masterplan had a proposal to promote some sites for residential development but the public consultation showed little support. The Town Centre Steering Group therefore agreed to replace this proposal with one that sought improvements to Central Park

2. What is the future for Westhoughton Civic Buildings and why have the public not been consulted on this?

Future use of Town Hall, Library and Carnegie Hall

Services ceased at the Town Hall in late 2020 and there are currently no plans for them to return. Westhoughton Library offers full digital support to access council services and the general public can book in for IT mentoring sessions.

The council's property partner, PSP, and wider design team appointed by the Council in February 2022 to consider a number of issues including:

- Understand legal, design, planning, heritage and cost implications of repurposing the buildings
- Provide flexible space to meet community requirements
- Continue to provide space for the Library and the Westhoughton Historical Society
- Understand what opportunity there is to provide commercial or leisure space to complement community uses and create footfall to support the library use, as well as provide commercial income to the council to help support the running and maintenance costs of the building

A number of surveys have also been undertaken including:

- Condition survey
- Measured survey
- Structural survey
- Mechanical and Engineering survey

Draft concept layout proposals drawn up as follows:

Town Hall

Level	Westhoughton Town Hall
Ground Floor	3x retail units Town clerks' office Meeting room
First Floor	Council chambers Offices, breakout area & meeting room
Second Floor	Offices & breakout area

Carnegie Hall and Library

Level	Recommended Option	Alternative Option
Ground Floor	Library and historical society	Leisure/Commercial space
First Floor	Community space with kitchen & storage	Library/historical society/ community space, kitchen & storage

Update 21/09/22: Following further review it has been determined that the adaptation of the space within the Town Hall does not require planning consent and removes a delay in any work commencing. We are now working to the following milestones, noting that no final decisions have been made on layouts or take up of space:

November 2022 – Request for additional funding for works to the Town Hall to be presented for formal approval to Executive Cabinet Member for Regeneration

November 2022 – Appointment of main contractor

November 2022 – February 2023 - Intrusive site surveys and site investigations

End February 2023 – June 2023 - Phase 1 – Advanced works contract/Soft strip out/Site mobilisation

July 2023 – June 2024 Phase 2 – Main contractor Construction

It should be noted that the buildings are old, and the extent of the required budget is unknown at this stage. Until the full costs are identified the implementation of other works associated with Key Development Priorities will have to be paused as we have a limited budget available. A fixed budget is available to undertake this work and as the cost of renovating all the civic buildings would likely exceed this budget it may be prudent to undertake a phased delivery. The wider design team will continue to design a viable scheme that can be both attractive to commercial tenants, thereby providing an income stream to cover ongoing maintenance costs, whilst also being used by the Community.

The Council intends to take the commercial opportunities the buildings present, especially the Town Hall, out to the market, to gauge interest, with the view to agreeing Heads of Terms and securing end users in October 2022. The opportunity for local businesses to formally express an interest in the opportunity will be progressed in the first instance. It is important to note that the Council needs to create a self-sustaining building which will require a commercial income to be generated to maintain the building into the future. Should there be a lack of local interest the council will advertise the commercial opportunities further afield. Any local businesses that may be interested in taking space should email westhoughtontowncentrefunding@bolton.gov.uk to register their interest.

Consultation – please refer to FAQ 1, the Community were given the opportunity to participate in the consultation process on the draft Key Development Proposals for Westhoughton and the project has moved forward honouring the outcome of that consultation exercise.

3. Who will be able to use the offices within the Town Hall?

No firm decision has been taken at this stage. They could be let on a touchdown basis for small businesses to use as and when required, let to a single end user or be fully managed. Any local businesses that may be interested in taking space should email westhoughtontowncentrefunding@bolton.gov.uk to register their interest.

Greater Manchester Police (GMP) has requested a drop in facility, potential office space for meetings and access to facilities.

4. Can part of the Town Hall/Library/Carnegie be used for Community Use

The current proposal for the library and Carnegie Hall is to have the upper floors for sole use by the community. An audit of community facilities is currently being undertaken to better understand the requirement in Westhoughton for space of this nature.

5. Can health facilities be included as part of the proposals?

The council has no control over the location of health services. Until 30th June 2022 this was determined by the Bolton Clinic Commissioning Group (CCG). On 1st July 2022, a new statutory organisation came into being, the NHS Greater Manchester Integrated Care this brings together the 10 Greater Manchester CCGs, Greater Manchester Health and Social Care Partnership and Greater Manchester Shared Services. The council will engage with the new body to see if additional health practices can be located to the town centre but this would mean existing practices giving up their current locations which they may be reluctant to do.

6. Can part of the Town Hall be used as a banking hub?

Update 21/09/22: Following the closure of the last bank branch in Westhoughton town centre a request was made to the LINK Group for a Banking Hub. This request has been turned down when assessed against the following criteria which is provided by the Cash Action Group:

- Distance to alternative cash facilities, including the nearest bank branch, Post Office, and free-to-use ATM, as well as the travel time of each by public transport.
- The size of the retail centre within the area, particularly the number of retailers.
- Demographics of the local population, focusing on the percentage of those considered financial and digital vulnerable, as well as aged over 65 yrs.

The same standards are applied across the country.

Council officers raised the issue of an appeals process and have been advised that one has yet to be agreed. However, the issue was raised in the debate of the Second Reading of the Financial Services and Markets Bill earlier this month: <https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3326>
The LINK Group will now work with the banks and the Financial Conduct Authority on what it might look like. Council officers have asked to be kept informed as matters progress.

7. Are there any plans to redevelop Westhoughton Community Hub as part of the proposals?

The Council have no plans to redevelop the asset.

When and if any plans for the Hub are formulated, they will need to be discussed and approved at a formal Executive Cabinet Member meeting of the Council. The Council's asset management policies mean it is impossible to implement redevelopment or disposal proposals, for any Council asset, without Member approval and consultation with Ward Members.

8. What are the Steering Group's priorities and how has funding allocated/determined?

The main priority of the group is to bring forward the approved masterplan Key Development Priorities (KDPs) in a timely manner, with focus concentrating on the civic buildings and the remodelling of Market Street. As outlined previously, the KDPs were formulated via a public consultation process; the outcome of which is now being honoured.

In relation to funding, on the 21st January 2019 Cabinet approved a £12m allocation of funding from the £100m Town Centre Strategy Fund to carry out targeted interventions in Farnworth, Horwich, Westhoughton and Little Lever.

On the 20th February 2019 Full Council approved an additional £4m of funding from the 2019/20 Capital Programme for further investment in town centres, (principally in Farnworth town centre). This additional £4m funding is subject to capital receipts received into the Council and is currently unsecured.

The Strategy and Masterplan for Westhoughton was approved by Executive Cabinet Member on the 9th November 2020 and on the 15th March 2021 the Executive Cabinet Member approved the delivery of Phase 1 works for Westhoughton and allocated £415,490 for works to improve the pedestrian links to the town centre along Library Street, Marsden Street and the passageway linking Market Street to Ditchfield car park, improvement works to Central Park including a feasibility for the refurbishment of pavilion buildings and central space to support commercial and community use.

On 14th March 2022, the Executive Cabinet Member approved an additional capital allocation of £2.3 million for the final design and delivery of a new public realm scheme for Market Street.

All future spending must be formally approved by the Executive Cabinet Member.

9. How was Steering Group set up and who decided who could join?

Membership of the Steering Group was put together in consultation with Councillor Wilkinson, as the then Chair of the Group, and at the outset included all Ward Members, Town Council representatives and known service providers such as Bolton at Home, NHS, Westhoughton High School etc. and representatives from local businesses.

The Steering Group helped to develop the Master Plan and endorsed the priority projects to be taken forward.

10. What is the council doing to create more car parking spaces?

The council is aware of the perceived lack of car parking spaces and procured a car parking strategy that included surveys of both main council owned car parks and the privately owned Pavilion Square car park. The survey highlighted that spaces, while at times in short supply, were always available. It recommended that a case for additional car parking could be made on the basis of Pavilion Square ever becoming unavailable but there are no plans in place for this to happen.

A number of proposals were presented at the last Steering Group meeting, including making Library Street a short stay car park with a 3 hour maximum stay, but were not supported and therefore not taken forward.

The council is now looking at its land ownership in the area to ascertain if its sites are of a sufficient size, and close enough to the town centre to be turned into additional car parking spaces.

11. How can I object to planning applications

Anyone can comment on a planning application, you do not need to have received a letter to comment and you do not have to live in the area. Please note that a planning application has not yet been submitted in relation to Westhoughton's civic buildings.

When the council receives a planning application we will write to the neighbours who are on the property boundary to let them know about the work(s) that have been applied for.

Public consultation on a planning applications lasts for 21 days and comments can be made on line at <https://paplanning.bolton.gov.uk/online-applications/search.do?action=simple&searchType=Application> or by post to:

Planning Control
Directorate of Place
Town Hall
Bolton
BL1 1RU

Please note:

- comments are publicly accessible and so cannot be treated in confidence
- you must give your name and address with your comment
- comments by post must include the relevant planning application number
- if permission is granted, neighbours or interested parties cannot appeal against the decision,
- the council does not acknowledge comments or petitions

The planning officer cannot consider some comments if these are not planning matters. They include:

- boundary disagreements
- concern about disturbances while the work is done
- trader competition
- impact on property value

You can request to see comments but these can only be viewed at the One Stop Shop and cannot be sent electronically.